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SUBJECT: CDA Discusses Elections With Pagan Amum

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert E. Whitehead, Charge d'Affaires; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 28, CDA Whitehead met with Pagan Amum, Secretary General of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), who stated that the SPLM may partially boycott April elections for the National Assembly if the outstanding census dispute cannot be resolved. Amum also talked up election chances for SPLM presidential candidate Yassir Arman (SPLM), stating that Arman will win in southern Sudan and is competitive in northern Sudan and Darfur. In northern Sudan, Amum sees Arman picking up votes from northerners who recognize that a presidential victory by Arman is the only chance for unity in Southern Sudan's January referendum. Amum's analysis, while partisan, raises interesting questions as to whether a Bashir presidential victory in April is really a foregone conclusion. End Summary

SPLM Boycott of National Assembly Elections?

¶2. (C) On January 28, CDA Whitehead met with Pagan Amum, Secretary General of the SPLM, who stated that the SPLM may partially boycott April elections for the National Assembly if the outstanding census dispute cannot be resolved. According to the approach discussed by Amum, the SPLM would run candidates for all executive offices, the legislative assembly of Southern Sudan, and for northern seats in the National Assembly, but not for southern seats in the National Assembly. Amum said that this partial boycott of elections for the National Assembly would invalidate any moves by the National Assembly to change Sudan's interim constitution and/or block the south's referendum. (Note: Ensuring a blocking right in the National Assembly to constitutional changes that could affect the southern referendum continues to be a foremost concern of the SPLM. In return for accepting a census result they see as flawed, the SPLM want a guaranteed percentage of the seats in the National Assembly, currently somewhere between 27 and 30 percent. End Note.) Amum noted that he supports this approach but that the idea is still being discussed in Juba.

Amum Promotes Yassir Arman's Presidential Hopes

¶3. (C) Amum talked up election chances for SPLM presidential candidate Yassir Arman, stating that Arman will win in southern Sudan and is competitive in northern Sudan and Darfur. In northern Sudan, Amum sees Arman picking up votes from northerners who recognize that a presidential victory by Arman is the only chance for unity. Amum also noted that Arman's origins as a Muslim and member of the riverine Arab tribe, the Ja'Aliyin, limits the ability of the National Congress Party (NCP) to play to religious or racial sympathies in the north. (Note: Historically, Sudan's leaders come from three riverine Arab tribes, the Ja'Aliyin, the Dunqulah, and the Shaiqiya. Omar Bashir, current President of Sudan, is also from the Ja'Aliyin tribe. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Amum said he sees support for Arman in Darfur as well. Amum said that he thinks the people of Darfur will be willing to vote in the elections, but that fair elections require the lifting of the state of emergency there. In fact, Amum said that he had recently spoken to Abdul Wahid, Paris-based Chairman of the Sudan Liberation Army, who told Amum that he will encourage his people to vote for the SPLM. Amum said that, ultimately, Arman is the candidate for change in Sudan, and that the majority of Sudanese want change.

¶5. (C) Amum said there is a real possibility that the NCP and the

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Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) ultimately refuse to hand over power if Arman does win in the polls. He said many SAF officers still view a hand-over of power to the SPLM akin to surrendering to the enemy. On the other hand, Amum said that some army officers are tired of being used by the NCP and view the SPLM as the only way forward. He added that Bashir's following in the SAF's senior leadership is cult-like, but that the rank and file are increasingly dissatisfied.

¶6. (C) Comment: Amum's analysis, while partisan, raises interesting questions as to whether a Bashir presidential victory in April is a foregone conclusion, as conventional wisdom holds or whether the NCP would hand over the reins if Arman scored an electoral upset. On the one hand, Bashir holds the levers of power, and Sudan as a whole has seen strong economic growth for ten years. On the other hand, Bashir has been in power for 24 years, and Sudan's periphery remains largely marginalized. Ultimately the race may turn on the question, how fed-up are the Sudanese people? We also note that Amum's comments on NCP refusal to continue talking with the SPLM are entirely in conflict with what we are hearing from the NCP.
WHITEHEAD